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THE STATUS OF NORTH VIETNAMESE INFILTRATION INTO SOUTH VIETNAM

Conclusions

1. During 1966, the infiltration of almost 78,000 men into South Vietnam has been reported.* US military authorities, as of 25 January 1967, had confirmed the infiltration of about 39,500 of these and accepted as "probable" the infiltration of another 10,000. At least 21,000-24,000 of the personnel whose infiltration has been confirmed came in as members of 12 North Vietnamese infantry regiments whose arrival in South Vietnam during 1966 has also been confirmed by MACV. Nine of these regiments came in via the Laos corridor route and were assigned to portions of the country from the southern I Corps area southward through III Corps. The other three regiments and elements of a fourth regiment came directly across the DMZ into the northern part of I Corps.

2. All 12 of these infantry regiments arrived in South Vietnam in or prior to the summer of 1966. Since then, although there have been a few reports of the arrival of additional infantry regiments during the latter half of the year, none has as yet been confirmed. Although it is possible that the arrival of one or two additional infantry regiments since summer may eventually be confirmed, the indices point to a sharp drop in the infiltration of such units in the latter half of 1966. There have

been limited [redacted] indications of regimental

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infantry infiltration in contrast to the large number of such indications which were evident during the heavy influx of these units to South Vietnam in the first half of 1966.

3. In addition to the infiltration of infantry regiments which took place during the first half of the year, there was a steady influx of North Vietnamese support elements and other units, some intended as replacements and fillers for Communist units already in place in the South. During the latter half of 1966, the infiltration statistics, as based on the evidence now available, appear to suggest a drop off in such infiltration. However, we think this is probably not the case. A large number of these personnel are now carried under the "possible" category in current infiltration statistics.

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4. We believe that the most valid explanation for the drop in the infiltration of regimental-size infantry units during the latter half of 1966 is that Hanoi had achieved most of the basic force structure planned for South Vietnam in 1966. It continued, however, to send in support and filler personnel to flesh out this basic force structure and provide replacements.

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5. It is therefore possible that Hanoi may see little value now in infiltrating additional infantry regiments into South Vietnam. We do not believe, however, that a cutback in infiltration of major North Vietnamese units would necessarily be indicative that North Vietnam is getting ready to negotiate or to discontinue the war in the South. Available evidence continues to indicate that North Vietnam is prepared to maintain over-all infiltration at high levels and to prosecute a long war, if necessary, to achieve its objectives. Nor do we believe that a change in tactics -- if there is one -- should be interpreted to mean that the Communists intend to break up their large units or revert solely to guerrilla warfare. We see no indications that Hanoi plans to break up any of its existing regimental or divisional structures in the South, even though these units have generally proved unable to carry out large-scale mobile warfare. The mere presence of these Communist main force units poses a substantial and continuing threat which we believe that Hanoi will seek to maintain.

6. We thus believe that it is valid to conclude that Hanoi still plans to continue vigorous efforts in support of the war in South Vietnam and that, pending more definitive information on the last quarter of 1966 and early 1967, it would be premature to assume that a further buildup in units and personnel will not occur.

I. Evidence Concerning Regimental Infiltration

1. Since December 1964, when the first regular North Vietnamese Army Regiment arrived in South Vietnam via the Laos corridor, a total of about 21 North Vietnamese infantry regiments moved into South Vietnam. [redacted] Seventeen of these regiments moved via the Laos corridor and three regiments and elements of a fourth regiment entered South Vietnam directly across the DMZ. All of these regiments arrived in South Vietnam in or prior to the summer of 1966. Since then, there has been no confirmation of the arrival of additional infantry regiments. The accepted total number of regiments introduced during 1966 (12 infantry regiments) slightly exceeds the number which arrived in 1965, and it is possible that more will be accepted.

2. The infiltration of the above units as well as the high rate of total infiltration of North Vietnamese personnel as replacements and in support units during 1966 (See Section II) have tended to obscure what may be a significant, although possibly temporary change in the pattern of infiltration of North Vietnamese units. It appears that the infiltration of North Vietnamese regimental size infantry units via the traditional infiltration route through Laos dropped off sharply after the summer of 1966. The last infantry regiment to arrive via the Laos corridor which has been accepted in the MACV order of battle is the 52d Regiment; [redacted]

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Since then, however, there has been little evidence

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which would indicate the arrival of more North Vietnamese infantry regiments except across the DMZ. The movement of the three regiments directly across the DMZ within a short period of time marked a significant departure in the pattern of infiltration both in the context of the route used and the size of force involved.

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3. It is of course true that the confirmation of arrival of units has in many cases been considerably delayed. The 32d Regiment, for example, was not firmly identified until 10 months after its arrival, and a delay of three to five months in firm identification of a unit is about normal, particularly in cases when the unit has not been engaged in a battle which has resulted in the capture of prisoners and documents. The evidence obtained only recently that the 165th Regiment was in South Vietnam for some seven months before being firmly identified has again shown the pitfalls of relying on currently available data to assess the level of infiltration at any time.

4. There are, however, other indices which support the likelihood of a sharp drop in regimental infiltration through Laos in the last half of 1966. During late 1965 and early 1966, when the bulk of North Vietnamese regiments moved to South Vietnam,

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there were substantial indications from a variety of sources that a large-scale augmentation of the North Vietnamese Army and infiltration of units into South Vietnam was under way, even though it was not until some time later that the scale of the movement and identification of the units could be established. These indications included: some evidence from North Vietnam on expansion of the armed forces and statements which implied that NVA units were to be committed to the South;

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and documentary evidence of the

formation or planned formation of NVA divisions in the South. In many (although not all) instances, there were indications of the presence of NVA regiments in the South before they met the criteria of order of battle acceptance.

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5. In contrast there were only a few indications during the last six months of 1966 which would suggest continuation of any

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significant movement of NVA regiments through Laos. There is, moreover, only limited evidence on the infiltration of regimental forces in the DMZ area for the period September-December 1966. During 4-6 October, some units were seen infiltrating the Western/DMZ/Laos border. While a regimental size force has not been engaged, there have been repeated sightings and contacts with platoon to battalion size units. This indicates that the area was in use, although the size and type of force is unknown and no units have been accepted in the OB.

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Captured documents, including some excellent documentary information from Communist Military Region V have provided no evidence that additional divisional structures are present or in process of formation in that area and have generally confirmed present OB holdings.

II. Infiltration of Personnel Other Than in Regimental Units

6. Except for the movements through the DMZ into Quang Tri

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Province, we believe that cumulative evidence strongly suggests that the North Vietnamese have concentrated more on fleshing out their basic force structure in South Vietnam (divisions and infantry regiments) over the past six months than in adding additional major infantry units. This does not mean, of course, that all infiltration via the Laos corridor has ceased since the movement of replacement groups and various types of support units has almost certainly continued via this route. Several such units have been accepted in OB, including at least one artillery regiment (the 84A Regiment) which arrived in about August. The function of units of this type is to provide support to existing divisional and regimental infantry units.

7. In terms of 1966 infiltration statistics MACV has accepted (confirmed and probable) about 50,000,

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Approximately 21,000-24,000 of the accepted infiltrators entered South Vietnam in infantry regiments. The remainder entered as replacements or in support/specialized units. If we consider only the infiltrators in the "accepted" category, the average monthly infiltration rate during 1966 is about 5,400.* When computed on a quarterly basis for the first three quarters of the year the average monthly rate for each quarter would be 8,000, 6,000 and 2,600. If both infiltration categories -- accepted and possible -- are considered, the average monthly infiltration rate is 7,900. Monthly averages for both

* Based on first nine months of 1966.

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categories when computed on a quarterly basis are 10,600, 7,500, and 5,600, respectively.

8. Although a large number of the support units and other personnel are still carried under the "possible" category in the infiltration records the present evidence indicates that the entry of many of them -- especially for the months from July through October -- will eventually be confirmed. We believe, therefore, that the confirmed rate of infiltration of other than regimental units, at least through October, will eventually come into line with the confirmed rate for this type of personnel for the first half of the year. There are tentative indications, based on an incomplete data, that the infiltration of support units and other personnel, via both the DMZ and the Laos corridor route may have dropped off during November and December. Reports have been received so far on the possible arrival of less than 1,200 infiltrators. However,

[redacted] reports as yet unconfirmed of a

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possible step-up of infiltration in late December and in January 1967. We believe it is too early to conclude whether or not there has been a significant change in the rate of infiltration since October.

III. Possible Reasons For Change in Infiltration Pattern

9. The most valid explanation for the apparent change in the infiltration pattern may be that the North Vietnamese, as of the summer of 1966, had achieved most of the basic force structure they

had planned for South Vietnam in 1966. By July 1966, Hanoi had a force of seven divisions in being with at least 21 infantry regiments. There was fairly good evidence that NVA and VC forces had planned and hoped to implement a series of fairly large-scale military operations during the latter half of 1966. Such an action may have been planned, for example, in the northern provinces of South Vietnam by a multi-divisional force coming across the DMZ. Hanoi may have hoped such an offensive would achieve a significant victory in this area or, at the least, divert sufficient US forces to northern South Vietnam to permit Communist units elsewhere in South Vietnam to launch major offensive operations.

10. Pending the outcome of the operation, North Vietnam may have decided to cut back the infiltration of major units into areas farther south. While the ultimate objective of the DMZ operation is not entirely clear, the documents captured from the 324B Division and statements of its prisoners suggested, at least initially, that the NVA did hope to "liberate" Quang Tri Province and perhaps Thua Thien Province as well and establish a stronghold in the northern area of South Vietnam which would facilitate further infiltration and offensive operations. If so, the operation, like other large-scale operations planned by North Vietnamese forces in 1966, largely failed to achieve its objectives (although it has

tied down a considerable US force in the area) and resulted in at least a temporary withdrawal of major elements of the invading force into the DMZ or North Vietnam.

11. Elsewhere in South Vietnam, Communist attempts to launch large scale actions were often thwarted when NVA/VC units were simply unable to react rapidly or to change their tactical plans in the face of US/FWMAF spoiling operations. In addition, Communist units suffered from an inferiority in firepower, mobility and logistics when opposed by US forces.

12. One additional possible explanation for the apparent decline in regimental infiltration is that the Communists have decided to give less emphasis to large-scale operations and more to small unit actions and guerrilla-type warfare. There is some recent evidence to support this, and the general lack of success which the Communists had in launching large-scale operations over the past year would suggest that they have somewhat belatedly made a more realistic assessment of their capabilities and have recognized that more emphasis on small-scale operations would be in their interest. If in fact a decision has been reached to give primary emphasis to small-scale operations, it might be that North Vietnam would see little value in a further substantial buildup in the number of regiments or divisions in South Vietnam. In this case, infiltration over the next several months at least would probably

be comprised largely of replacement groups, small, specialized units, and the total number of infiltrators per month will probably be oriented toward offsetting attrition rather than toward substantially increasing the number of major units as in late 1965 and early 1966.

IV. General Comment on Hanoi's Intentions

13. We do not believe that a cutback in infiltration of major North Vietnamese units would necessarily be indicative that North Vietnam is getting ready to negotiate or to discontinue the war in the South. Available evidence continues to indicate that North Vietnam is prepared to maintain over-all infiltration at high levels and to prosecute a long war, if necessary, to achieve its objectives. Nor do we believe that a change in tactics -- if there is one -- should be interpreted to mean that the Communists intend to break up their large units or revert solely to guerrilla warfare. Although the Vietnamese Communist press has carried a number of recent articles implying greater attention to guerrilla-type operations, these articles have also indicated that Communist tactics still call for a combination of guerrilla and conventional warfare. An article in the December issue of the Hanoi journal, Hoc Tap, reiterated that the war in the South should be prosecuted by both guerrilla and conventional methods on a long-term basis and employing "flexible, varied strategies and tactics." One objective

of intensive operations by guerrilla units, according to the Communist press, is to facilitate the operations of main force units. Moreover, it is possible to employ division and regimental-size units in guerrilla-type operations without breaking up their organizational integrity. We see no indications that Hanoi plans to break up any of its existing regimental or divisional structures in the South, even though these units have generally proved unable to carry out large-scale mobile warfare. The mere presence of these Communist main force units poses a substantial and continuing threat which we believe that Hanoi will seek to maintain.

14. We thus believe that it is valid to conclude that Hanoi still plans to continue vigorous efforts in support of the war in South Vietnam and that, pending more definitive information on the last quarter of 1966 and early 1967, it would be premature to assume that a further buildup in units and personnel will not occur.

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